



Dear Friends in Christ:

A LETTER FROM OUR PASTORAL COORDINATOR

*May Christ's peace, joy and hope be with you all!*

Last week I wrote about how Christian love is different than our cultural understanding of love and Jesus himself ultimately defines that “love” for us as his disciples. Self-emptying love is the bar to which followers of Jesus aspire. It is the kind of love of which St. Paul writes in his letter to the Philippians. “Rather, [Jesus]emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, coming in human likeness; and found human in appearance, he humbled himself, becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross” (Philippians 2.7-8). The self-emptying of Jesus, his “kenosis,” is a constitutive element of Christian love.

As his disciples the same is of course true for us. Jesus calls us to empty ourselves on behalf of others, desiring the good of the other, over what may not necessarily be good for ourselves. This aspect of self-surrender, I believe, has its roots in Christ's compassion for us. On the 16th Sunday in Ordinary time, just a few weeks ago, our gospel chronicled when Jesus looked out over the crowds, he was able to overlook the weaknesses, selfishness and sins of those he viewed. “When he disembarked and saw the vast crowd, his heart was moved with compassion for them, for they were like sheep without a shepherd.” (Mark 6:34) Jesus understood their struggles. Even more importantly, he understands our own difficulties today. Even with our failures, he reaches out to us in love, with a willingness to enter into our suffering. Jesus chooses to focus on our goodness, not our breakdowns.

This compassion of Jesus is something we can live out now. As I spoke in my homily this last Sunday, using the example of Bl. Charles de Foucauld, Charles gave up on his desire to convert the Tuareg peoples to Christianity. He discerned rightly in his prayer that God never intended for him to convert these nomadic peoples of the Sahara. God intended him rather to love, understand and care for these people. He was to see Christ in them. His hope was that the Tuaregs would see Christ in him through his compassion, service, and love for them. Bl. Charles was well known for his incredible generosity in sharing whatever food and water he had with those in need. His self-effacing attitude and humility were revered while he lived in the Sahara.

I experienced a kind of desert when I worked for four and a half years in Catholic Ministry at the Pierce County jail. Along with a team of individuals—two of whom had been serving for 10+ years—we led Bible studies, visited with inmates, and prayed with them. We attempted to love with full knowledge our own needs and wounds. We, the Ministry team, had no more dignity than the inmates we served, despite what they had done or how they saw themselves. In a sense, our hope was that those with whom we walked knew of Christ's love for them in the time, care, understanding, and energy we gave on Thursday nights.

In a sense, we inhabit a kind of desert in our culture today. Most of us are quite comfortable and lack not for food and water, and even basic comforts. But there are those around our parishes and neighborhoods who do lack these things. Our appropriate Christian response, of course, is compassion. We must be willing, like Jesus, to empty ourselves of what we cling to so that others can grow and develop as they should, even when it draws more from us than we figured. Our piety reaches its apex when we're acting on behalf of others in humble and generous service, just like Christ Jesus.

In God's great love, hope, and mercy,

*Deacon Jim*